

“I thirst.” Continuing our Lenten meditations, we come to these words of Jesus from the cross. “Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I thirst.’ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of a hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips” (John 19:28-29). Hearing these words, you can imagine how this sermon might begin. Maybe you expect a literal description of the tortures our Lord endured on the cross and his excruciating thirst. Or maybe you expect an opening illustration, something about a hot day and hard work. Something designed to get you to remember what it was like to be really thirsty. Instead, I simply have one question for you. For what do you thirst?

Am I trying to trap you? You’ve heard enough sermons to see where this is going. We shouldn’t “thirst” for things. But that’s not where I’m going; this is no trap! I *am* taking certain things for granted here today. I am assuming that I am talking to the Christian church, those redeemed by the blood shed by our Savior on the cross, those whom the New Testament calls “the body of Christ.” I am talking to those who know the promise of an end to suffering because Christ died for us. I am talking to you. I’m talking to you who fit the description of 1 Peter 4:1-2: “Since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.”

I hear Peter calling us to “arm” ourselves with the same thinking of Christ. I hear Peter saying we’re done with sin but I know we still struggle with sin. So today, let’s think about ourselves as that body of Christ, as sinners...but saved sinners who are already armed with the same manner of thinking as Christ. With this in mind, for what do we thirst?

We thirst for justice, for healing, for an end to suffering. We thirst for those without work to find jobs, to be able to provide for their families. We thirst for safety, especially for the vulnerable and defenseless. We thirst for an end to violence of every description. One look at our weekly prayer list will show you what we thirst for.

At last we have come to the part of the sermon where I am supposed to turn the corner. I could take a moment to look closer at the Gospel lesson. I could point out to you that John lets us know this drink was given to Jesus in order to “fulfill the Scriptures.” We could look back at the psalm Jesus fulfilled, Psalm 69:21. It says “...for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink...” I could tell you that just as God promised a brief release from suffering for Jesus in the form of a drink on the cross, so in the same way we can know that God will meet our needs. This is the part of the sermon where I am supposed to tell you that your thirst will be quenched as well. Well, I’m not going to say it, because it’s not true.

We thirst, and sometimes there is just no relief. Sometimes there is no cure for the cancer. Sometimes no new job comes. Sometimes the house is foreclosed. Sometimes there is no water to quench the thirst. It's like the story we heard last week of the children buried under rubble in Haiti. Two of them were rescued, but one of them died. Before Sabrina's brother died, he asked her for water. But she couldn't find any.

What is there to say to the "Sabrinas" of the world? Oh sure, religious people have countless phrases to call upon in these situations, phrases we use so often they can even become meaningless in our own ears. How could they possibly help? Try telling one of our "Christian clichés" to Sabrina and see what she has to say! In the face of such horror, would I dare to say something like, "God never gives you more than you can handle"? I don't think so. The Sabrinas of the world, and anyone else who has truly suffered, needs far more than a pat answer; far more than bumper sticker theology.

This would be the perfect time for me to say that we have something far more. This is the right time to remind you that clinging to a cliché is not what we're after. It's the right time to direct your attention to a person. God's own Son, Jesus. That may be what you're expecting. And at this point, it is exactly what I am going to do, because that is the most important thing I can do. Jesus lives. It is the only news that can be good now. Jesus lives. But is that enough? If this good news—this Gospel—that Jesus lives doesn't seem like enough, perhaps it's because we don't realize what we need. Let me say that again. Please hear it. If this good news—this Gospel—that Jesus lives doesn't seem like enough, perhaps it's because we don't realize what we need.

All too often we live in the moment. We live in the midst of whatever suffering we are currently in, and can't see what we really need. We focus all our attention on alleviating the suffering right now. We want an end to that suffering. That man, thirsting on the cross, would come to an end of his suffering. He would die. And when he died, he paid for the sin which has brought so much suffering into the world and into our lives. But an end to suffering is not enough. Even if the pain is numbed, the wound remains. What we need is healing. And that is the promise we see in Christ's resurrection. Jesus lives! And because he lives, we too shall live. With his resurrection Jesus brings more than an end to our suffering. He brings us the promise of a day where all will be put right. All will be healed. All will be made whole. All the things that hurt us will be no more. There will come a time when death will be swallowed up and God himself will wipe every tear away from our eyes. End of suffering, indeed! That is our goal. That is what we truly need. Not just for the pain to end, but to be healed, to be made whole.

This is the hope which keeps us going in the midst of suffering. This is the certainty which arms us, as Peter says in our text, with the “same way of thinking as Christ.”

But this doesn't alleviate the suffering here and now. We still thirst. Must we wait with parched throats for this final day? Will our suffering never be alleviated now? By no means! God is daily intervening. In countless ways God is indeed giving us little sips of water so we can endure throughout this drought. Help may not always come, but because Christ lives we live in hope. Kiki and Sabrina may have lost their brother, but they were both rescued. In fact, that is one of the reasons why we are here.

We are the body of Christ in this hurting and suffering world. We are often the instruments God uses to alleviate suffering and bring hope in the here and now, as we wait for the day when final healing will come. We are the ones who wipe tears from the eyes of others as we wait for the day when sorrow will end. We bring the sip of water as we wait for the day when the drought will end. As we wait for the day... the day when the source of living water will return and we will thirst no more. We wait. Together.